Substitutions

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by StratsWrote

Summary

Will always knew when it was coming. Hannibal grew more anxious, fidgety, even. He fussed over seasonings, over plate placement, over the careful styling of each of Will's curls.

He was more tactile, his hands all over Will, and it slowly dissolved from sweet affection to the constant overwhelming stimulation of nerve endings, Will's skin crawling with every touch.

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The bathroom door locked, but it was more for show than anything else. It could easily be jimmied open in a pinch; the house had been designed with Will's needs in mind, and if he fell in the shower, Hannibal needed to be able to get to him.

The low countertop allowed Will to reach the sink from his chair, but he preferred to carefully hoist himself up onto it, propelling himself closer to the mirror. It gave him an excuse to stretch out, to use the muscles he'd developed to accommodate for the loss of others.

This close, Will could see the bags under his eyes, deepened in color over the past few days. The scar across his cheek from the Dragon, the one on his lip and the one through his eyebrow from smacking his face as his body was beaten against the rocks by the waves.

It would be today, he thought. Today fit the pattern.

The fall had damaged Will's spine irreparably. Hannibal had dragged his lifeless body from the sea, no doubt exacerbating the trauma. He would never walk again, even if they hadn't…

As if on cue, the doorknob jiggled. For a moment, Will's fight or flight instincts kicked in, and he froze, heart racing as he stared at the door.

There was nowhere to flee, not in the bathroom. The only way out was through Hannibal.

Hannibal would have outrun him anyway.

"Will," came Hannibal's disapproving voice.

"I just need a minute," Will called back. His hands shook as he lifted his toothbrush. Time to clean himself up. Time to get pretty for date night.

He heard a soft slide of fabric against wood and knew that Hannibal had seated himself outside the door again. As if he might miss Will's exit otherwise.

"I wish you wouldn't hide from me," he said softly.

"I'm not," Will lied, spitting into the sink. "I just want to… freshen up."

"I loved you bleeding and choking on sea water," Hannibal said. "I will love you still if you're a little untidy."

Will screwed the cap back on to the toothpaste and set his toothbrush aside. He could see all of himself like this, all the way down to the place where his pajama pants had been tied off to hide the stumps. He could feel his heartbeat in his teeth.

Last time, there hadn't been enough anesthetic. Hannibal swore it had been an accident, but Will opened the medicine cabinet anyway, hand hovering over the bottle of aspirin.

Aspirin was a blood thinner. He could bleed out. There'd be nothing Hannibal could do about it if he didn't know.

Will touched the cap, two fingers tracing the edges.

No. Not today.

Hannibal fussed with the door again. Will swallowed thickly. "Just a minute!" he called. He lowered himself from the counter back into his chair, seated just in time for Hannibal to jimmy the door open.

"Told you I wasn't hiding," Will muttered, eyes averted.

Hannibal took hold of the chair, wheeling it back out into the master bedroom. Once there, he knelt before Will, brow furrowed.

"Are you feeling alright, Will?"

Alright. Will nearly choked on the thought.

After. He would be alright after. When Hannibal was affectionate, overly so. When Hannibal coddled him, made all his favorite foods. When Hannibal remembered that they had a relationship outside of *this*.

"I'm a little nauseous," Will said. Hannibal pressed a palm to his forehead.

"No fever. You should be alright."

He pressed a kiss to Will's brow and then stood. The chair began to move.

They had purchased a single-story home, to best suit Will's needs, but there was still the basement. The chair rolled down the hall, the trap door creeping closer and closer.

Will's chair wouldn't go down the hidden stairs. Instead, Hannibal hoisted Will into a bridal carry, careful as he made his way down.

The door closed behind them; the soundproofing sealed.

Will thought it would probably be his kidney, this time. Hannibal had talked about it often enough, assured Will that nothing about his diet need change. But as Hannibal laid him out onto the table and set the IV to his elbow, Will saw where Hannibal's gaze lingered.

"No," he said, reaching out to latch on to Hannibal's sleeves. "Not my hands."

He could not imagine such helplessness. Already, he relied too much on Hannibal's kindness and generosity, traits that he had cultivated rather than developed innately. Traits that Will sometimes felt were in limited supply.

Hannibal hushed him, taking Will's hand in his and pressing a kiss to the knuckles. "Just the left one," he promised. "I'll leave the dominant hand."

"No, Hannibal *please—"*

There was ice in Will's veins, the weight of his own limbs pinning them down. The world was hazy. It centered around Hannibal, around a small, crooked smile.

No more bodies, Will had said. *You'll lead them right to our door. I don't want to lose you.*

No more bodies, Hannibal had agreed. *Of course, Will. I love you.*

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